# Upstairs Downstairs: London Weekend Drama Series

*Previous* THEATRE QUARTERLY *Casebooks have examined the production process of plays in the theatre, and have been based on information collected by an actor or assistant director directly involved in the production. In the case of* Upstairs Downstairs *– London Weekend Television's drama series based on life in an Edwardian household – the Editors have entered the often radically different world of television drama, to extend the usefulness of the other material on television in this issue.* Upstairs Downstairs *is one of the growing number of period series and serials. It has features of both: episodes form complete plays, but characters and the over-all story develop over thirteen episodes. The first six episodes were broadcast in the autumn of 1971, the other seven of the first series in the spring of this year – and a further series of thirteen episodes is being made for transmission in autumn 1972. In the following Casebook study Catherine Itzin has drawn on various documents produced during the production process, on notes kept by Ian Scrivens, an observer at the rehearsals, and individual conversations with selected members of the production team, to describe what happens between the original idea for a series and the finished product that millions of viewers finally see on their screens. As* TQ *goes to press, it is announced that* Upstairs Downstairs *has been awarded the Society of Film and Television Arts award as Best Drama Series, and Fay Weldon the Writers' Guild Award for Best Series Script for her first episode.*

## Where Does a Drama Series Come From?

The idea for *Upstairs Downstairs* originated with two actresses and close friends – Jean Marsh and Eileen Atkins. Talking together, they discovered they both came from similar lower class Cockney backgrounds and that Jean Marsh's mother and Eileen Atkin's father had both been 'in service.' They dug out old photographs of themselves as children, grinning, posed at their sixpence-a-lesson tap dancing classes – and there was a photograph of one of their families outside a pub, ready to start on an outing in a horse-drawn bus. They began to wonder what it would have been like if they'd been born thirty years earlier and had had the limited opportunities of their parents. They talked about their attitudes to the upper classes – arrogant and conceited, thinking they were fit to run the country because they were born to it and were better looking. What were the relations between the two classes really like? Thus it was they thought: 'Why not a television series based on the life of the servants in a Victorian house?'

They were fed up with always being cast in upper and middle class roles, too, and wanted to try something different. Jean Marsh wanted to play a serious servant's part, and Eileen Atkins wanted to try a solid comic role. So they began to work out an idea in which a series of stories could revolve around two maids, events in the house being seen from their point of view. Jean Marsh wrote down a story covering thirteen episodes, worked out ideas for thirteen plots, made up a family tree for the characters they'd created, and made some notes about possible casting.

What then? The two actresses suspected they had a saleable product and would have approached one of the television companies themselves. But Jean Marsh felt – because of discrimination against women and because actresses are usually regarded as 'pretty but brainless' – that if she sent her idea direct to a company, it probably wouldn't get past the secretary's desk. So they decided to find the backing of a production company with a well-known male producer. At this stage they approached one of the partners in Sagitta Productions Ltd., an 'idea selling' agency which had previously mounted the *Gold-robbers* series produced by London Weekend Television. The actresses sold Sagitta fifty per cent of the rights in what was eventually to become *Upstairs Downstairs*.

One of the Sagitta partners, the historian and film producer John Hawkesworth, was immediately taken with the idea. As he recalled: 'The original idea for the series was a comedy – high jinks in the servants' hall – set in a Victorian country house and aiming to show the relations between the people upstairs and the servants downstairs. The major character was supposed to be one of the maids.' During early talks between John Hawkesworth, Jean Marsh, Eileen Atkins and John Whitney – also a partner in Sagitta – the original idea was modified for various reasons. They decided to set the series in Edwardian England in a house at Eaton Place, London, between the years 1903 and 1910, and to mould the stories around serious subjects.

Hawkesworth: *The Edwardian age is becoming increasingly topical, bearing increasing similarity to our own times – with glitter and glamour and great luxury side by side with appalling squalor. It was a 'golden age' whose magic was to be shattered by the First World War. It was also an age of transition from the rigid hierarchies of Victorian England to the apparently wild chaos of the 'roaring' twenties.' King Edward's rich new friends were breaking down the barriers of social distinction and movements for social reform were stirring. So while we wanted the series to appeal to a wide public as entertainment, we also hoped to deal seriously with the personal and social conflicts of the Edwardian period – with birth control, love (legitimate and otherwise), pederasts, artists, mediums, armament manufacturers, babies (legitimate and otherwise), suicide. Every play had to be set in an exact month in an exact year, for purposes of historical accuracy, and so we could examine the subjects which were topical at a particular time.*

The production team used copies of *Punch* (1904–6) to capture the atmosphere of Edwardian England. Originally the titles and credits for each episode were to be superimposed on a selection of *Punch* drawings (right: the illustration used on the credit card for Episode 1, Fay Weldon's *On Trial*), but this was eventually abandoned for technical reasons. Far right: Joan Benham as Lady Prudence Fairfax and Rachel Gurney as Lady Marjorie in Episode 5, *A Suitable Marriage*. A deliberate attempt was made to reproduce accurately the period in costumes and sets.

# Selling the Idea to a Company

The Sagitta partners did some additional reading and research and roughed out in more detail what they thought the series could be like – thirteen episodes of an hour each. They formulated a proposal consisting of fourteen sheets of typescript – about 5,000 words. This was sent to Stella Richman, then Controller of Programmes at London Weekend, who decided within a matter of weeks to buy it. What were the qualities of this original proposal that a television company was so speedily interested in it, and why?

**The Period Background**

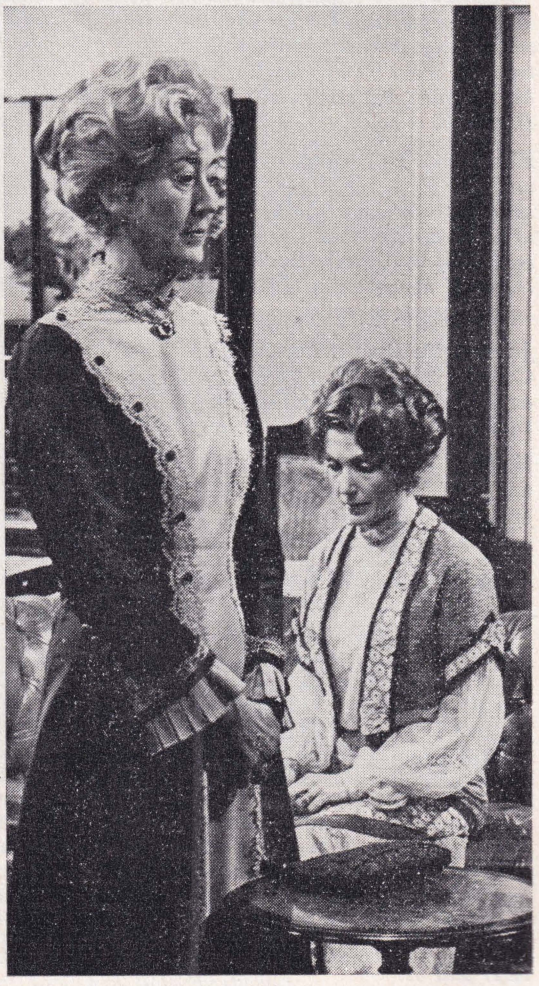
First of all they explained in evocative detail why they'd selected the Edwardian era:

*Until the First World War destroyed it for ever, a society grew up and flourished that matched any in history for its richness and extravagance. Never since Roman times had the Western world enjoyed such a varied vice, such an orgy of pleasure. It was exceedingly vulgar, snobbish, and unashamedly materialistic. Its God was Mammon . . . an international society whose one object was pleasure. . . . Young bloods drank to their loved ones from their slippers, in champagne, of course; old bloods gave late suppers at Maxim's and had their mistresses sculpted in ice cream. . . . For the poor, the lower classes, life was grim. Unemployment was high and the fear of losing a job allowed employers to work their employees long hours for very low wages. Three pounds a month was an average wage for a living-in servant. . . . The staple diet of the poor was bread and gruel; as a luxury, 'block ornaments,' those odd hunks of meat that had no other name. For entertainment there was the sixpenny cinema, the music hall and the bedlam of the pubs with gin at a penny ha'penny a shot . . . . Sex was the only thing that was free, and the enormous families that resulted only increased their poverty. Pawn shops did a roaring trade and wives would 'pop' their husbands' best suits on Monday to raise money for food until the wage packet came in on Friday.*

The document also included a section describing the kind of social barriers which existed between the people above-stairs and those below-stairs, followed by a breakdown of the kind of day a typical servant could expect to lead.

*The day started at 5.00 a.m. for the junior servants. There was a great deal to be done before the family breakfasted at 9.00. The cookers had to be cleaned, lit and blackleaded; the boilers stoked; the front steps scrubbed; breakfast cooked for the upper servants; the gentlemen's boots cleaned and the bootlaces ironed; the early morning teas served upstairs and all the grates cleaned and fires lit in all the bedrooms and living rooms; the hot water delivered to each room in the big copper jugs.*

That was *before* 9.00 a.m. There then followed a description of the kind of relationship which existed between servants and masters: 'The most intimate conversations took place in front of the servants, the convention being



that they did not exist as human beings. . . . With a preponderance of frustrated females below-stairs, jealousy and emotional scenes were the order of the day and love affairs of every sort were unrestrained. . . . The two cardinal sins that a female servant could commit were theft and having a baby. They both meant instant dismissal without hope of a reference.' Five pages of the ten-page original proposal were devoted to setting the background in this kind of detail: obviously the facts and the descriptive language were well-chosen for a persuasive, sometimes, emotional appeal.

## The Original Characters

Having dangled these tasty morsels of period background before the hungry eyes of a television company – always searching for new material to fill the perpetual hours of network time – they gave a detailed breakdown of the characters as they then saw them.

**Richard Bellamy,** *the Master, is a minor figure in the Establishment and an M.P. for a London borough, having been a foreign correspondent for* The Times. *He is divorced from his first wife with two children by her, and re-married. On the board of several companies, he makes money out of armaments. He keeps a mistress in St. John's Wood and has 'other less conventional vices and strange appetites which are also known to the servants and which make him vulnerable both in his private and public capacity to a blackmailer. Another matter of continual speculation is Bellamy's relationship with his Butler and Valet Frank Hudson.'*

**Gail Bellamy** *is the driving force behind her husband, an actress and a dancer and one of the first of her kind to become respectable through marriage – 'her name was linked with the Prince of Wales.' She has ambitions for her husband to get a title and devotes herself to achieving such aims. She has many lovers, 'but conducts her affairs with brilliant tact and discretion and usually to gain a foothold in an important camp. Gail is not popular with the servants; she has come up the hard way herself and knows too much about the way they think. Nevertheless they admire her for her toughness and justice, and for the way she has got where she is. It gives them hope.'*

**Elizabeth Bellamy,** *nineteen, lives at home with her parents and devotes herself to good causes. She is a keen suffragette and spends a lot of time below-stairs. She is a pacifist and disapproves of her father's armament connections. 'She is really the Edwardian equivalent of a hippie. She has a profound influence on Mary Buck, the under housemaid who becomes her friend and follower in the suffragette movement.'*

**James Bellamy,** *twenty-two, a Lieutenant in the Household Cavalry, is worshipped by the servants, spoilt and a bounder. 'The lower classes are beneath his contempt and if he gets a girl into trouble it is just another good story for the Mess.'*

**Nanny,** *an old harridan who's been with the family for years. She reared Richard Bellamy, then Elizabeth and James, and presently looks after the 13-year-old child of Gail and Richard who 'is a cripple and not quite as others are.'*

**Frank Hudson,** *the Butler and Valet, has been with his master for many years and served as his batman in the Boer War. 'He looks the copybook example of the perfect butler, but he has a Jekyll and Hyde personality which reveals itself below-stairs, where he is cock of the roost.' He likes to project the image of himself as Bellamy's adviser and confidant. 'He has a widowed mother who lives in Reading, and each week he sends her almost all his wages.'*

**Kate Bridges,** *the cook, 'aged sixty, a stout, short woman with high blood pressure, painful bunions and a temper which she never troubles to control. In her off-duty hours she disappears into her room and tipples, usually alone. Her recipes for hangovers are many and mysterious. She is a great upholder of the barriers that divide the classes, a strange mixture of philosophy, religion and non-logic to support her view that all persons are not born equal and never will be.'*

**Rosie Mimms,** *head parlourmaid. 'Wearing her uniform makes her look exceedingly sexy in a subtle way.' She is a perfectionist in her work and dominates the life of Mary Buck. 'When Mary begins to form other friendships, Rosie is wildly angry and perhaps doesn't realise that it is the terrible jealousy of a lover. If there had been a servants' union, Rosie would have made a fine shop steward.'*

**Mary Buck,** *the under house maid and the central character of the stories. She starts as a fresh and innocent country girl new to London life and domestic service. 'She relies on animal instinct and a natural cunning and charm to cope with situations and people. She is determined to make a success of everything she does.'*

## The Rest of the Package

The final paragraphs of the original proposal to London Weekend were concerned with how the stories would be handled and the style of the series. 'The stories will go deeply into character, keeping the canvas small, but the detail absolutely clear.' Part of the package included Jean Marsh playing Rosie Mimms, Eileen Atkins as Mary Buck, and George Cole, who was interested in playing Hudson. Sagitta stressed that 'it is not intended that the stories should be mere kitchen-maid romances, but serious dramatizations by the best writers available, and made to the highest possible standards.' Part of the deal included a producer (John Hawkesworth) and a Script Editor (Alfred Shaughnessy).

Clearly in presenting this package to London Weekend those involved had taken considerable pains to evoke the atmosphere, the setting and characters they wanted to achieve in great detail. Clearly, also, there was a sensational element in the content of the proposal – sex, vice and intrigue, and even a bit of violence, stressed whenever there was an opportunity of exploiting it in character or situation. Whatever the ends they eventually wanted to achieve with the series, the first job was to *sell* the idea to a television company. To do this they had to compete in a highly competitive market. Partly because of the inherent dramatic qualities of such a series, partly because of a current popularity in period pieces as a result of the extensive adaption of classics for television, partly, no doubt, because of the detail with which the proposal had been worked out, and partly because the package offered specific people for key roles in the production team, London Weekend decided to go ahead.

The early concepts of characters and story were noticeably different, however, from those of the final taped episodes. Richard Bellamy and his wife changed drastically: Bellamy became the son of a country parson, from a very respectable if non-aristocratic background, a more sober and socially-conscious man with a personal humanitarian sympathy for the lot of the servant classes. His wife became *Lady* Marjorie, a member of an old aristocratic family who married beneath her class 'for love' – as respectable as her husband. Richard Bellamy was no longer divorced, and Elizabeth and James were the legitimate issue of his marriage with Lady Marjorie. Much was made of the fact that Bellamy had married 'above himself.' Mary Buck became Sarah as played finally by Pauline Collins, and while she remained the 'major character' it seemed more a consequence of the talent and personality of the actress than any inherent qualities in the character. Nanny hasn't materialized, nor has the 13-year-old crippled daughter. All in all, the final series as taped and broadcast was 'tamer' and less sensational: at the same time it gained – in depth of character, in 'realism,' and in its serious treatment of serious issues – what it lost in seeming sensationalism. Whatever the bualities of the original proposal which 'sold' it to London Weekend Television, the qualities which made the final series worth a serious look in the context of current television drama were not those which stood out in the original proposal.

# Next Step — a Production Plan

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| **Summer 1969** | Jean Marsh has lunch with Sagitta directors John Hawkesworth and John Whitney and tells them about her idea. |
| **November 1969** | Original proposal presented to London Weekend Television. |
| **December 1969** | London Weekend agree to buy the series. |
| **April 1970** | *Upstairs Downstairs* scheduled for production. |
| **July 1970** | John Hawkesworth and Alfred Shaughnessy prepare Production Plan and submit this to LWT. They start working out stories and commissioning writers. |
| **11 November 1970** | First Video Tape Recording (VTR). |
| **6 June 1971** | Final VTR. |
| **4 February 1971** | First public broadcast scheduled, then cancelled. |
| **10 October 1971** | First public broadcast. |

Selling the idea is only the first step: then the hard work begins. The first thing a company wants after this is a detailed production plan, a kind of combination progress report and statement of what needs to be done.

*Taking 23 October 1970 as the first VTR on a two-week turn round, we must aim at having the first six scripts delivered in draft stage for planning twelve weeks before that date. That is by Monday, 3 August. This is only five weeks away so we are already short of time. We shall have to commission six writers initially and hopefully pick the best of them to write more plays in the series. We must be very sure to find out that they haven't and won't take on other commitments which will interfere with the quality and delivery of their script to us. Both the writer and his or her agent must understand that the delivery date is the date by which the script* must *be delivered or payment will be withheld.*

There followed, for LWT's information a list of fourteen writers they intended to approach, only four of whom eventually wrote for the series. The production plan then explained the procedure for choosing directors:

*The directors of this series must not only be technically very efficient, but extremely sensitive to actors and to the detail of the period. There will be no great chance for action sequences as such; the action and movement will come through the dramatic interplay of the characters. Two directors would be the ideal number, to co-operate with each other and combine to make a style.*

There followed a list of thirteen directors known to be available for the dates required. Five of the names had asterisks – indicating they were preferred. In the end only two directors from this list were actually employed and there were in fact five different directors for the thirteen episodes. An initial brief on the required settings was included:

*As we intend that the greater part of the stories will take place inside the walls of the big house in Regents Park (later Eaton Place) the design of the sets that will be used many times and the studio planning becomes very important. Both the design of the sets and the dressings and the props, as well as the details of the costumes, will be very important and will become a vital part of the style of the production. The research will be considerable. For instance, the exact details of the laying of the dining room table for a big dinner party; the layout of the cook's table before she starts to cook, consisting of sixty different items; the details of hair style and jewellery and dress before Lady Helen (later Marjorie) Bellamy is ready to set out for a court ball at Buckingham Palace.*

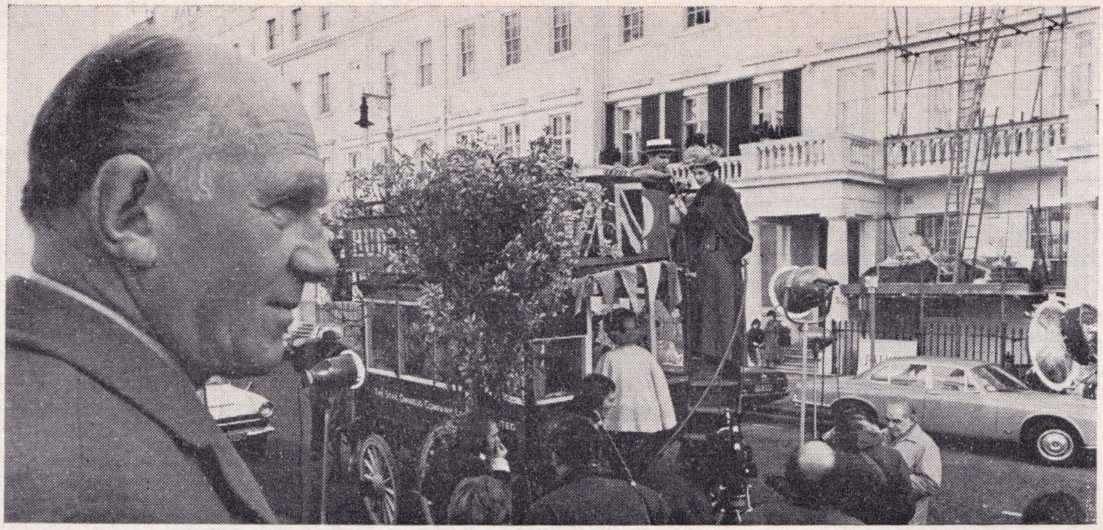
There followed a specification of the ten rooms needed for filming the series, with a note that not all these sets would be used at once in an episode, but several times in the series. There were further notes on the characters:

*They will not all be seen in every episode and the actual characters who play the servants may change if someone dies, or is sacked, or resigns. The characters marked with an asterisk will stay the same and be running through the thirteen plays. It is intended that Jean Marsh will be in all thirteen episodes and that Eileen Atkins will play the lead in three episodes.*

The production plan (three pages, about 1,000 words) ended with a description of how the Producer and Script Editor would set about getting the stories.

*We are now preparing the storyline for all thirteen episodes and working out the pattern of participation for each character in each episode and specifying the date. Thus the writers will know the outline story they are to tell, where it fits into the series, and if it is to be a comedy, a tragedy, or a drama. We are also preparing a detailed brief for writers giving the character outlines of each character, the technical details of each servant's job, and a further set of historical and technical references.*

Above: During the VTR for Episode 5, director Joan Kemp Welch adjusts Roberts's (Patsy Smart) head for the correct camera shot, while Hudson (Gordon Jackson) waits for the scene to begin. Below: The Bellamy household, masters and servants. Left to right: Pauline Collins (Sarah), Angela Baddeley (Mrs. Bridges), David Langton (Richard Bellamy), Rachel Gurney (Lady Marjorie Bellamy), Patsy Smart (Roberts), Jean Marsh (Rose); (back) – George Innes (Alfred), Gordon Jackson (Hudson), Brian Osborne (Pearce) and (front) Evin Crowley (Emily).



Location filming for the servants' outing. Producer John Hawkesworth on the left. Rose (Jean Marsh) on the steps of the bus. Cameramen had to avoid showing the 1970's scaffolding on the house opposite.

# Turning Ideas into Plays

Between April 1970, when *Upstairs Downstairs* was scheduled for production by LWT, and July, when the Production Plan and the brief for writers was prepared, many more discussions took place, especially between Hawkesworth and Shaughnessy. They had yet to settle on a final title. Suggestions included *The Servants' Hall*, *Two Little Maids in Town*, *Below Stairs* (unsuitable because of the book of the same name by Margaret Powell), *Upstairs Downstairs* (quoting from Goosey-Goosey-Gander), and *75 Eaton Square*. Wrote Shaughnessy: 'The last of these is my suggestion for the setting of the series, as the house concerned belonged to my family throughout the Edwardian era and we should not need to clear the address! I also thought of modelling the Bellamy's house on No. 75, which is still vividly in my memory.'

It was at this stage that the series got a beginning: 'As we are to tell the stories from the point of view of two maids, we shall need to open with Mary (later Sarah), a simple country girl, daughter of a poor farm labourer, coming to London from Dorset to go into service. She will go to a domestic agency and be sent by them to be interviewed in a large house in Eaton Square by Lady Helen Bellamy. She will be engaged as under housemaid and meet, at her first meal in the servants' hall, Rosie the head parlourmaid, who will be a seasoned servant, knowing all the ropes. They will develop a relationship. . . .' Already the situation outlined in the original proposal was changing considerably, and there were to be many more changes of detail before the final stories were settled. However, even this very early description is essentially what was to become the opening scene of episode one. Here, Shaughnessy continues to describe what might happen in the first episode:

*The main thread of the series will thus be the story of the coming together of these two girls from very different backgrounds (Rosie will be the product of an over-crowded London slum family); the shifting relationship between them; and their involvement in the various incidents which arise in the house. It may begin with Rosie being a little unkind and cruel to the new maid, making her carry the can for her, possibly resenting her intrusion into the servants' hall, where she (Rosie) has gained the attention of the young footman – until Mary/Sarah arrives. Later, through some common experiences, they will gradually become friends, sharing jokes and secrets about the family and the other servants. Then as time goes on and Mary/Sarah gains her confidence, there may be moments of jealousy and rivalry between them . . .*

Hawkesworth and Shaughnessy discussed the problems of continuity:

*Like all the best series, we must have just the minimum of background continuity – mainly deriving from the relationships of the permanent characters – and in the foreground a series of strong, self-contained stories which begin and end inside the episode. . . . Each story will be about something that occurs to one or more members of the Bellamy household – family and staff. And the event will affect everyone under the roof of No. 75. A documentary interest in the subject will be achieved by the accuracy with which we shall research and point up in the scripts such details as the wages, duties and conditions of work for servants. . . . It will be seen, of course, that domestic servants in 1903 – with some exceptions – were, on the whole, content with their lot and accepted as a matter of course a position of near-slavery which no thinking person would put up with today.*

Certain fundamental character changes occurred during the talks which resulted in the new set of notes:

*Bellamy: I feel sure he should not be a divorced man with step-children. His background, as outlined in the original proposal, is fine, and his secret vices will be useful, but I think he should have married, in order to further his political career, into one of the great political families (like the Cavendishes, Cecils, etc.), so that his wife (first and only) is Lady Helen Bellamy (née Talbot-Carey) daughter of the Earl of Southwold. Thus, rather than an ex-actress, etc., she is a woman of breeding and intelligence with a political upbringing, who is determined to prove herself to her family by marrying a promising young back-bencher and pushing his career towards Downing Street itself. Neither Bellamy nor his wife should be drawn from the outset as promiscuous characters. If they are found later on in the series to have lovers/mistresses, it will come as a shock to the servants, the viewers and the Bellamy's friends . . . . It might help to add to the family a ten-year-old boy (afterthought) called Edward, who will be away at a good prep. school (Wixenford) some of the time, but, when at home, looked after by Nanny. This boy would replace the crippled daughter of the original format.*

At this still early stage, they decided against the extensive use of location filming:

*The Bellamys can have a fine country house and we can refer to it and to events which have taken place over the weekend, but let us keep it offstage. If the playwright's craft is brought to bear on the scripts, there should be no need ever to see a London street or a coach-and-pair. The sound of horses' hooves outside merging with the distant sound of a barrel-organ, the running to the window and looking out. The sound of the bell clanging downstairs and the announcement of a guest . . . all the atmosphere can be conveyed without trying to get shots of coaches in the streets of Edwardian London – avoiding supermarkets and parking-meters. Noel Coward showed us the whole of Queen Victoria's funeral in* Cavalcade *through the eyes of the Marriott childen leaning out of the nursery window, so please let's remember that television is electronic theatre and not second-rate film.*

In the Production Plan submitted to LWT it had been stipulated that almost every part of every story would be set inside one house and that filming on location would be restricted to five or six days maximum over the thirteen plays. In fact, in the end there were only three days of location – two of film and one Outside Broadcast. Hawkesworth simply felt that the money should be spent on good actors, writers, sets and costumes.

# Problems of Writing to Order

The writers were given two written briefs – a chronology of episodes with a suggested story-line, and a more general description of the background (including a copy of the original proposal with the historical background, the setting and the characters). There were also in each case lengthy discussions between the writers, John Hawkesworth and Alfred Shaughnessy, while the latter then worked with each writer on the various drafts of their plays.

In the briefs writers were instructed '*not*, as in an Oscar Wilde play, to tell stories about rich people in a London drawing room, and occasionally have a robot-like footman come in to announce dinner,' but to show the lives of the people upstairs from the point of view of their servants.

Writers received a detailed description of each of the characters in the series – in their 'finished' form *before* they were 'brought to life' by the playwrights. Many significant changes had been made, so that in some instances there was little resemblance to the kind of character outlined in the original proposal Richard Bellamy (50) and his wife Lady Marjorie (45) were much as they had evolved in Shaughnessy's hands. Richard is now a 'tall handsome man with charm and strength of character . . . a model of correct behaviour,' without his 'unconventional vices and strange appetites.' Left far behind in the character of Lady Marjorie as a 'woman of breeding and intelligence' was the promiscuous Nell Gwynn figure of the original Gail Bellamy: and though Elizabeth Bellamy has similarities to her original, her Socialist tendencies and sympathies with the servants are much more subtle. James Bellamy is no longer the out-and-out bounder of his original conception, though he might 'sleep with Gaiety girls in Camden Town.' The character of Nanny has been discarded.

The 'downstairs' characters had also been significantly modified. Whilst Hudson is still the servile and devoted servant upstairs, and 'very much the boss downstairs,' he is now dignified, efficient and fair, the Jekyll and Hyde personality and the poor old widowed mother scrapped. Mrs Bridges too became more human – 'a brilliant cook, one of the best in London, and therefore an asset to the Bellamys.' No more tippling, but she does 'supplement her wages by selling dripping and portions of household supplies to a crone, who comes to the back door.' Surprisingly, the backgrounds of Rosie (now Rose) and Sarah were reversed. Rose is now 'country-bred – the daughter of a farm labourer,' while Sarah 'is something of a Cockney waif, product of an over-crowded slum family, who has worked in sweat shops, laundries, shops, but never in private service. She may have been in trouble with the law.' Rose has become, like most of the other characters, less of a caricature, more real and human. 'She has compassion and is the self-appointed mother confessor and "auntie" to the young servants, undermaids, when they are in trouble. She gives good advice and is very warm-hearted and understanding.'

With this extensive information on the stories they were to dramatize and the characters they were to use, the writers were finally instructed: 'Any of these characters may be used at any time, but not all of them in one episode. There is no need to see them all at once in the house. Writers must leave room (in the budget) for visiting characters by keeping the regulars down to a reasonable number. Writers must do their own research for details needed in stories, but the Script Editor has a number of reference books on hand and can give advice.'

## The Writers

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| Episode 1 | **Fay Weldon** |
| Episodes 3 and 8 | **Charlotte Bingham and Terence Brady** |
| Episodes 5 and 10 | **Jeremy Paul** |
| Episode 4 | **John Harrison** |
| Episodes 6 and 12 | **John Hawkesworth** |
| Episode 7 | **Julian Bond** |
| Episodes 9 and 12 | **Alfred Shaughnessy** |
| Episode 11 | **Raymond Bowers** |
| Episode 13 | **Rosemary Ann Sissons** |

## Fay Weldon Writes the First Episode

Well-armed with the package that was to become the series, Fay Weldon was asked to write the first play of the series, and also Episode 12. How does a dramatist feel faced with the task of writing to a plot and characters provided by someone else? It's a fairly common problem for people writing episodes for drama series, but then usually the *characters* are set, while the individual writers suggest the story. In this case both were pre-set and the writers were essentially faced with dividing the stories into scenes and writing the dialogue.

Fay Weldon – mother of two, and pregnant with her third child while writing for *Upstairs Downstairs* – has been writing regularly for television for seven years, but felt that the creative opportunities of writing within such a structured framework were limited. She tried to work as creatively as possible within the given situation and was fairly pleased with the results of the first play – though with perspective she felt that it was probably closer to a piece of 'hack' scriptwriting than 'writing a play' in the way one can in a one-off play slot. (For various reasons – partly because of the nature of the changes made to her script after it had left her hands, she asked that her name be removed from the credits of Episode 12). She intimated that if she had not been given the opportunity to write the first play in the series, she probably wouldn't have written for it at all. She doesn't mind writing with limitations of time, space or even basic situations, but she feels if you're given the conflict as well – then you're left with 'pap.'

Of course the first play provided a challenge which subsequent writers couldn't have had. Though the characters were delineated in detail, it was in the hands of the first playwright to bring them to life as people – and as these people they would have to continue throughout the series. The first playwright additionally had to manage to introduce and establish most of the major characters while still writing a *play* which was dramatic, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and with an artistic unity in its own right. Fay Weldon read the briefs, including the period background, though she didn't do any research of her own. She used the story suggested by Alfred Shaughnessy, and, dramatically, restricted herself to showing the beginnings of a friendship between Rose and Sarah. She wrote the first draft (see page 32) in a fortnight, finishing it whilst on holiday in France. (When asked why Sarah tells such an 'exotic' story of European aristocratic/gypsy parentage, Fay Weldon said the idea had probably come to her because she was abroad at the time, and it seemed something a romantic and spirited cockney girl without respect for her superiors might say.) She wrote two drafts of the whole play, and re-wrote the first scene several times before it was 'right.' Throughout this process she worked closely with the Script Editor, Alfred Shaughnessy.

## Fay Weldon's Synopsis for Episode One

*On Trial.* Nov. 1904. In three acts. End of first: caught at back door. End of second: her illiteracy. About ignorance and authority. Mary arrives at No. 75. Goes to the front door. Sauces the footman, mistakes the butler for Sir and the Lady's Maid for M'am. Mary's bold and bright, with a rich fantasy life, and pretends to a mysterious past and parentage. She almost convinces them: her first encounters with the gentry seem to bear out her almost mystical nature. She charms Marjorie, to Rosie's annoyance. The cook is selling perks: Mary does the same. (She has a highly developed sense of survival, and needs it. She doesn't mean to be a servant all her life. She'll get out somehow.) Mary's caught by Rosie. There's a below-stairs trial. Mary has her secrets bullied out of her: the fantasy of course is nothing. She is revealed as humble, desperate, and having had a little trouble with the police in the past. Once this is out, of course, she is completely at their mercy. They try to make her sign something, and of course, she can't read or write. It is a tremendous shame to her. She cries. Now she is humble, they begin to be nice. They will keep her and protect her. She shall learn subservience, and be reformed. Mary shares a room with Rosie, whom she hates. But Rosie breaks down the resentment. Mary is a very frightened person. She is ignorant of men and the world, and all the secrets of sex. (The footman's in the next room. Very disturbing.) Rosie deals with her kindly. 'Because we are ignorant,' she is saying, 'we have to accept authority, service, poverty. The dangers otherwise are too great for us. We must accept what we know.' 'In that case,' says Mary, 'I won't be ignorant.' And in the middle of the night, cold and exhausted though they both are, Rose patiently begins to teach Mary to read. (From *The Cottager.*)

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## Fay Weldon's First Draft of the First Scene of the Play

*Exterior. It is 1904. Clemence walks bravely towards her future home. She carries a carpet bag. She walks perhaps too freely and boldly for someone in her position – which is one of the underlings of this caste-ridden world in which to be female is bad enough – to be a female servant is to be barely human. She looks nervous, but not timorous: she looks bold, but not pert: she is defiant – she has to be. She makes it as difficult as possible for the world to look down on her. See her now as she boldly passes a strolling policeman: he stops to look at her, then as she boldly goes up the front steps, he is reassured and passes on. All the gentry, after all, ring front doors. Hudson, the butler, opens it. Hudson may be pompous, have all the affectation of his trade, but he is not ridiculous. He is a serious person and has the respect of the household, not merely by virtue of his position as lord of the servants' hall, but because he deserves it. Clemence, such is her self-assurance, takes him in in a minute. He allows her over the threshhold.*

CLEMENCE: Mr. Bellamy? (*Hudson stares*).

HUDSON: Mr. Bellamy is at the House. I am Mr. Hudson, butler to Mr. Bellamy. Might I ask your business, Miss?

CLEMENCE: Then you're who I've come to see. That's good. I was a bit nervous, y'know how it is. They sent me from the Albright Agency. Your servant problems solved. Well, we all have problems, don't we. . . . (*But Mr. Hudson has opened the door and is pointing. Clemence's face stiffens.*)

HUDSON, The back door, girl.

CLEMENCE: But I'm in . . . . (*Hudson points on. Clemence shrugs and leaves. Hudson closes the door.*)

HUDSON: What is happening to the world? (*He is really most distressed.*)

(*Downstairs in the kitchen one of the bells jangles. Mrs. Bridges, stirring a gigantic pan, her nerves in pieces, shrieks her protest.*)

MRS. BRIDGES: Emily! Back door, Emily! (*Emily busy chopping very fine potato slices, misses, gets her finger instead, and shrieks.*)

EMILY: Ah, my finger! Blood! I'm dying!

MRS. BRIDGES: (*as the bell goes again and again*) Alfred. Back door. Someone, a mercy's sake, open that door, and murder whoever's out there.

ALFRED: (*busy*) As the Bible says, let he who rings, ring again.

MRS. BRIDGES: The Bible says nothing of the sort. Emily will you stop that shrieking and open that door.

EMILY: My finger!

MRS. BRIDGES: If you've got blood on those potatoes, you'll have the lot to do again.

ROSE: (*appearing*) I think there is someone at the back door.

MRS. BRIDGES: There now, it's curdled. (*And already in tears, she slings her wooden spoon across the room. Emily appears at her elbow, clasping her finger, peering.*)

EMILY: So it has.

MRS. BRIDGES: And we're all behind like the cow's tail as it is. Now get away from under me.

EMILY: How am I supposed to learn?

MRS. BRIDGES: Will nobody answer that door. It's going all morning.

ALFRED: Whoever it is will give up.

ROSE: I suppose for sanity's sake I'll have to answer it.

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## The Script Editor's Re-write of the First Scene

*Ext. The house in Regent's Park. Day. Nov. 1903. A small figure is approaching from the distance along the elegant Nash Terrace towards a large, imposing private house, the London residence of the Bellamys. The only sound is of the birds singing in the park and the clip-clop of a Hansom cab, as it drives by. As the figure draws near we see it is a young woman of the working class, dressed in her impoverished best – long skirt, elastic-sided boots, blouse, jacket and a straw hat with pins sticking out. As she passes, we realize that she is humming under her breath cheerfully in time with her steps: Marie Lloyd's immortal 'Oh, Mr. Porter.' Her name is Mary Buck and she is an East End Cockney. She reaches the steps up to the front door of the house, looks up to check the number against a scrap of paper in her hand, then marches confidently up and tugs at the large bell marked 'Visitors.' The bell is heard clanging inside the house. While she waits, she quickly reaches into her battered old bag and gets out an apple, starting to munch it. Thus, when the door is flung open and a very grand butler, Hudson, stands there glowering at her, her mouth is full of apple.*

MARY: (*mouth full*) I'm Mary Buck.

HUDSON: What do you want?

MARY: I've come about the position. Who are you?

HUDSON: Never you mind. Just get down those steps round the corner and ring the back-door bell. And don't let me catch you on the front-doorstep again, except to scrub it.

MARY: I haven't got the job yet.

HUDSON: That's enough of your lip. (*points*) Back door. Go on.

*Hudson slams the front door in her face. Mary puts out her tongue at him. Then, still humming 'Oh, Mr. Porter,' she marches off round to the area steps, down to the basement and rings the back door bell. Mary finishes her apple and throws away the core. The door is opened by a dark, slim young woman of 30. This is Rosie Mimms, who is the head house-parlourmaid.*

ROSE: Yes?

MARY: I've come about the job. Fellah all in black sent me down 'ere. Is somebody dead?

ROSE: (*cool*) Nobody's dead. That was Mr. Hudson, the butler. Servants aren't supposed to use the front-door. You'd better come in. (*Mary follows Rose in and the door is closed.*)

*Int. Basement hall, corridor and servants' hall. Day. The servants' hall leads off the basement corridor close to the back door. Other doors are to the butler's pantry and quarters and through to the kitchen and scullery.*

ROSE: You can wait in the servants' hall, while I let her ladyship know you're here. (*Rose leads Mary into the servants' hall, which is empty for the moment.*)

*Int. Servants' hall. Day. Quite a large room with a big central table for meals, now covered with a velvet cloth and an Aspidistra. There are a fireplace and several easy chairs and a dresser. The furniture is all cast-off stuff from upstairs. Victorian pictures adorn the walls, Landseers and views of Windsor Castle, etc.*

ROSE: You can wait in here.

MARY: Thanks. I'm Mary Buck.

ROSE: I'm Rose, the head house-parlourmaid.

MARY: That's a mouthful.

ROSE: (*still cool and formal*) If her Ladyship decides to take you on, you'll be working under me.

MARY: Go on.

*Rose gives her a look and leaves the room. Mary sits, looking about her. The door is wide open. Suddenly a terrible row is heard outside along the corridor. Shrill female voices, that of Mrs. Bridges, the cook and Emily the kitchenmaid.*

MRS. BRIDGES: I've told you before and I'm not going to tell you again . . . I won't have filthy dirty saucepans . . . look at these . . . you're a lazy good-for-nothing little slut . . . and don't you cheek me or I'll go straight up to her Ladyship . . . Come here . . . (*A resounding slap of hand on flesh. Sobbing is heard from Emily.*)

MRS. BRIDGES: . . . and do up your blouse, walking about the place showing off your dirty little neck . . . I know you . . . trying to catch the errand boys' eyes . . . come here . . . Emily. Come back here at once . . .

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## Fay Weldon's Second Draft of the First Scene in Response to the Script Editor's Rewrites

### Scene 1. Ext. Street. Day.

*It is 1905. Clemence walks bravely along the railings towards her future home. She rings. Presently the dark figure of the butler opens the door, declines majestically towards her as towards some small intrusive insect and points towards the back door. Clemence picks up her carpet bag and obeys. She goes down the back steps – darker and damper with every footfall – to the back door, and rings the bell.*

### Scene 2. Int. Basement lobby. Day.

*Inside, the bell jangles on the wall, one of many. Rose the parlourmaid goes to open it. Rose is cool, composed, reserved and formal– and very conscious of the dignity of her position. She might almost be said to be bossy.*

ROSE: Well?

CLEMENCE: (*nervous*) The Albright Agency sent me.

ROSE: (*unhelpful*) Well?

CLEMENCE: For the position. (*vague*) House parlourmaid was it?

ROSE: Under house parlourmaid. I am the parlourmaid.

CLEMENCE: Oh.

ROSE: You have references? (*Clemence, virtuous, produces them. She attempts a smile at Rose. But Rose, unsmiling and unbending, merely glances at them.*)

ROSE: (*disdainful*) In French?

CLEMENCE: Yes. (*Is she perhaps a little furtive? Rose certainly seems to think so.*)

ROSE: (*grudging*) Well, you'd better come in. I'll fetch Hudson. (*And Clemence is allowed over the doorstep. Rose leads her to the servants' hall.*)

CLEMENCE: (*to Rose's back*) Who's Mr. Hudson?

ROSE: The butler.

CLEMENCE: The one all in black when I went to the front door? (*Astonishment halts Rose momentarily in her tracks, but she says nothing, except at the entrance to the servants' hall, pointing:*)

ROSE: Wait there.

### Scene 3. Int. Servants' Hall. Day.

*Clemence sits on the edge of her chair in the dim empty vastness of the room. Empty chairs flank the massive refectory table. Whose? What sort of people? All as unfriendly as Rose? Clemence may not be frightened, but she is certainly intimidated. She becomes conscious of a rising bedlam of noise from the kitchen, culminating in a series of screams which take her from her chair to open the kitchen door, curiosity getting the better of fear.*

### Scene 4. Int. The Kitchen. Day.

*It is only Emily screaming. She stands in the entrance of the scullery clasping her finger. She is a simple, deprived, superstitious creature who seems to live at floor level and – whether it be cause or result – is certainly treated as a kind of household pet, to be alternately petted and kicked. She has been peeling potatoes and has sliced her finger.*

EMILY: I'm dying. Blood everywhere. Oh my finger. It's gone! (*But cook, Mrs. Bridges, to whom she is appealing, takes no notice. She is busy at the enormous stove, stirring a tiny saucepan with a wooden spoon. She has two voices – one genteel and authoritative, the other a manic shriek. She is basically kind, even warm-hearted (good cooks usually are), but so many obstacles stand between her and the perfection of her craft – bad ventilation, bad light, steam, cockroaches, over-work, the gentry's unreasonable demands, heavy pans, inefficient, whining and hysterical help – well, listen to Emily now – that her nerves are all to pieces.*)

EMILY: My finger! It's half coming off!

MRS BRIDGES: You said just now it had gone altogether.

EMILY: I daren't look.

MRS. BRIDGES: If you've got blood on those potatoes, my girl, you can throw them out and start again. (*Clemence in the doorway is quite taken aback by this apparent callousness. But it seems to quieten Emily: she turns back docilely to the scullery.*)

MRS. BRIDGES: (*shrieking after her*) And get a move on, girl. We're all behind like the cow's tail. As per usual. (*She turns and sees Clemence.*)

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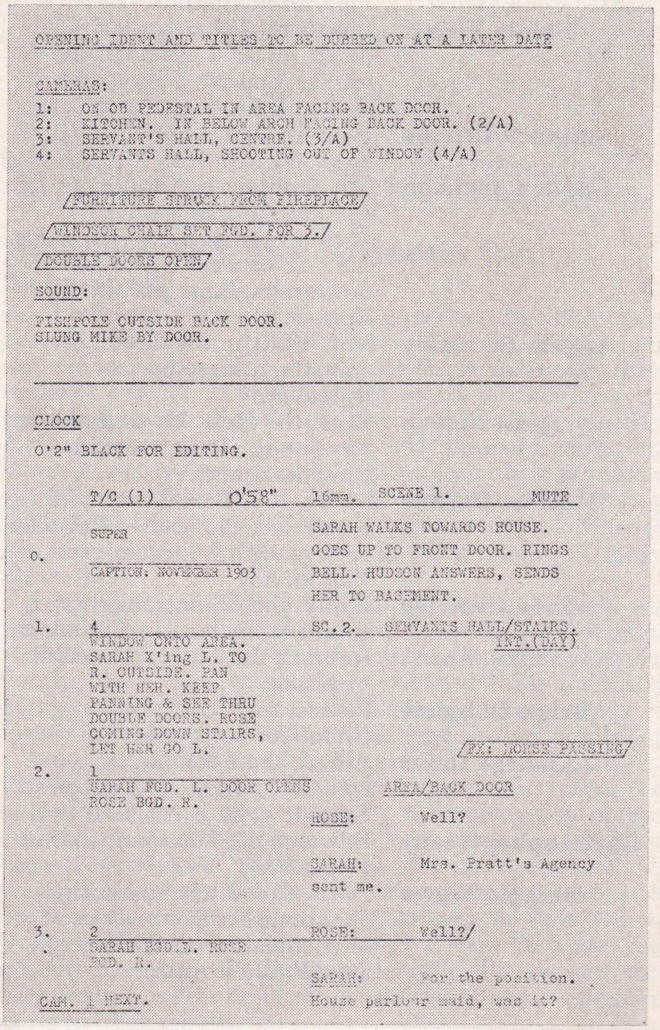
## The First Scene of The Shooting Script



OPENING IDENT AND TITLES TO BE DUBBED ON AT A LATER DATE

CAMERAS:

1: ON OB PEDESTAL IN AREA FACING BACK DOOR.
2: KITCHEN. IN BELOW ARCH FACING BACK DOOR. (2/A)
3: SERVANT'S HALL, CENTRE. (3/A)
4: SERVANTS HALL, SHOOTING OUT OF WINDOW (4/A)

/FURNITURE STRUCK FROM FIREPLACE/

/WINDSOR CHAIR SET FWD. FOR 2./

/DOUBLE DOORS OPEN/

SOUND:

FISHPOLE OUTSIDE BACK DOOR.
SLUNG MIKE BY DOOR.

---

CLOCK

0'2" BLACK FOR EDITING.

T/C (1) 0'58" 16mm. SCENE 1. MUTE

c. SUPER: CAPTION: NOVEMBER 1903 — SARAH WALKS TOWARDS HOUSE. GOES UP TO FRONT DOOR. RINGS BELL. HUDSON ANSWERS, SENDS HER TO BASEMENT.

1. 4 — WINDOW ONTO AREA. SARAH X'ing L. TO R. OUTSIDE. PAN WITH HER. KEEP PANNING & SEE THRU DOUBLE DOORS. ROSE COMING DOWN STAIRS, LET HER GO L. — SC.2. SERVANTS HALL/STAIRS. INT.(DAY) /FX: HORSE PASSING/

2. 1 — SARAH FGD. L. DOOR OPENS ROSE BGD. R. — AREA/BACK DOOR

ROSE: Well?

SARAH: Mrs. Pratt's Agency sent me.

3. 2 — SARAH BGD.L. ROSE FGD. R. — ROSE: Well?/

SARAH: For the position. House parlour maid, was it?

CAM. 1 NEXT.

# Producing the Plays

## The Production Team

The production team on a television programme is big: executive producer, producer, script editor, casting director, director, lighting director, lighting crew, cameramen, set designers, costume designer, electricians, floor managers, carpenters, painters, and all their assistants who see that the jobs get done. Apart from the large number of people involved in production, the time-scale for each production is very short. Television operates on a fortnightly turnover: a read-through by the actors on Monday, with rehearsals until the following Wednesday. Sets built on Tuesday night. The set lit and dressed on Wednesday. Technical run-throughs, fixing lights and camera positions on Wednesday and Thursday. VTR on Friday. Filmed at 7.30 p.m., sets struck by 9.00 p.m., so the studio is ready for the next production.

In the production of *Upstairs Downstairs* the roles of the producer and script editor have been accounted for. All other members of the team, except the directors, were provided by London Weekend. The executive producer was Rex Firkin; set designer John Clements (aided by Michael Lumb); and costume designer Sheila Jackson (aided by Ernest Hewitt).

## The Cast

| | |
|---|---|
| **Rachel Gurney** | Lady Marjorie Bellamy (in 9 episodes, the lead in Episode 6) |
| **David Langton** | Richard Bellamy (in 9 Episodes, the lead in Episode 7) |
| **Nicola Pagett** | Elizabeth Bellamy, their daughter (in 6 episodes, the lead in Episode 4 and joint lead in Episodes 5, 12 and 13) |
| **Simon Williams** | James Bellamy, their son (in 6 episodes, joint lead in Episode 3) |
| **Gordon Jackson** | Mr. Hudson, the Butler (in 11 episodes, in many ways the anchor man of the series, being the link between upstairs and downstairs, large part in Episode 9) |
| **Angela Baddeley** | Mrs. Bridges, the Cook (in 9 episodes, a large part in Episode 9) |
| **Jean Marsh** | Rose, the Head Housemaid (in 12 episodes, large parts in Episodes 4 and 13) |
| **Pauline Collins** | Sarah, the Underhousemaid (in 6 episodes, the lead in Episodes 1, 2, 3 and 10, large part in Episode 11) |
| **Evin Crowley** | Emily, the Kitchenmaid (in 4 episodes, the lead in Episode 8) |
| **Patsy Smart** | Roberts, the Lady's Maid (in 5 episodes) |
| **Brian Osborne** | Pearce, the Coachman/ Chauffeur (in 4 episodes) |
| **George Innes** | Alfred, the Footman (in 4 episodes: when he leaves after Episode 5, he is replaced by:) |
| **Christopher Beeny** | Edward, the Footman (in 6 or 7 episodes) |
| **Maggie Watts** | Doris, the Kitchenmaid (in 3 episodes, she takes over as kitchenmaid from Episode 9 after Emily's death) |

## The Script Doctors

How can nine or ten writers all produce, within a matter of weeks or months at most, a series of one hour playscripts in which all the characters behave coherently and consistently and really develop like human beings in a real situation? Surprisingly well it would seem. Only one episode was filmed and broadcast which the producer felt did not fit smoothly into the over-all story-development stylistically. Only one script had to be abandoned completely when the writer admitted defeat and John Hawkesworth wrote a replacement in four days, and the final script was written by Hawkesworth and Shaughnessy. In another case the writer asked to have her name removed and episode two was then broadcast without a writer's credit. In only one case – that of Fay Weldon with Episode 12 – were the changes required by producer and story editor so great that the writer preferred to withdraw her name as the script was no longer her own. Not a bad tally, with nine writers and thirteen episodes. The fact that the process worked as well as it did was due to the close liaison between writers and Script Editor. Writers of later episodes not only had the general briefing, but also the opportunity to read earlier scripts, and even later to see recordings of early episodes. Their challenge was to write plays of quality with not only stories and characters, but also to a developing style, and with previous events in earlier episodes established.

When a script is finalized, the task is then to cast it, select a director, rehearse, and tape it. Certain minor changes may be made to a script in the hands of the director during rehearsals, to facilitate shooting or to make lines easier to speak, but these will usually be minor.

## Casting the Actors

London Weekend's Casting Director Martin Case was responsible for all of the casting. The part of Rose was cast – as part of the package sold to London Weekend, Jean Marsh was contracted to play this part in all 13 episodes. Eileen Atkins was, until a very late date, scheduled to play Sarah, but she was unable to do it when she was offered the part of the Queen in Robert Bolt's *Vivat Vivat Regina* at Chichester. So she was replaced – after the first play was written with Eileen Atkins in mind – by Pauline Collins. (Fay Weldon had to make a few alterations to her script at the last minute to adjust the part of Sarah for the new actress). Pauline Collins proved so successful and popular in the first three episodes she was originally contracted to play, that her character was 'written back in' to the series in later episodes.

The series was devised in such a way that the cast had to work closely together as a team, playing large and small parts. One of the permanent cast was to be featured in each episode – to be the central character. It was therefore up to Martin Case to cast actors and actresses with supporting roles in four or five episodes who had the talent to play the lead in the next one. Everyone involved felt that the quality of the casting had been instrumental to the series' success. Both Jean Marsh and Pauline Collins said the cast came to feel 'almost like a family' – that this was the most rewarding experience they'd had acting in television. One reason for the closeness of the company may well have been the vested interests (financial and artistic) which members of the production team (Hawkesworth, Shaughnessy and Marsh in particular) had in making the series a success.

## Directing for a Drama Series

Derek Bennett, who directed the first, eventually unbroadcast, version of Episode One, Fay Weldon's play *On Trial*,

decided to work on the series when he was told about the idea by John Hawkesworth. History is his hobby – he directed a series called *The Caesars* for Granada several years ago – and what finally sold *Upstairs Downstairs* to him was the fact that the producer intended to deal seriously with social problems in Edwardian England. Bennett saw the first three scripts (he also directed episodes 2, 3 and 7) about two months before rehearsals were due to start, and he worked closely with the writers, the script editor and the producer in the re-writing of the scripts – which apparently was considerable. As he had directed many of Fay Weldon's television plays in the past – indeed he 'discovered' her in the first place – Bennett was familiar with her style. The first thing he did, however, was extensive research into the period: he made himself, within a matter of a few weeks, into a 'minor expert' on Edwardian times by reading, talking to people with memories of their childhood, even stopping elderly people on the street to ask them what it was like.

Much of a television director's work is done before rehearsals with the actors even begin. He has to decide how he wants to present a particular show. He talks at length with the designer – where the furniture will be, what it will look like, where the actors will be able to move in the set, what parts of the set will be seen, and how the actors can be seen against the set. Being the director of the first three episodes, Derek Bennett played a large part (in discussions with John Clements) in determining what the sets would be like: and they both felt that these must convey the feeling of a house with different planes even though in the studio the sets would all be on one level – and they had to be adaptable enough to accommodate not just the three scripts in hand, but the ten plays which as yet were unwritten.

Television is two-dimensional, and the director has to begin early to think of what he wants to achieve in those terms. Bennett works out his camera shots very early and knows them fairly accurately before rehearsals begin. He feels that he can then be flexible enough to change them when an actor says 'Why don't we do it this way?' Because television is such a technical medium, a director does as much work away from rehearsals as he does on the spot. When the cast go into the studio after ten days of rehearsal, the director must have all the technical aspects of the show worked out already. Once in the studio it is simply a matter of passing on information quickly to a large number of technicians, who only have two days in which to absorb the atmosphere of the play and then create it technically. Two days before going into the studio Bennett gives the lighting, sound and camera crews their shooting scripts with any necessary information about the effects that should be created scribbled in the margins. The production process in the studio is then a purely mechanical one.

With the actors, Bennett feels that he works, unlike some other television directors, much as a theatre director does – trying to get the best possible performance. In this case it was a great temptation for the actors to stereotype the servants (after all this is usually how they're played), but Bennett kept saying no, telling them that this time they could actually attempt to create real people. Particularly in television where there is such limited time, actors are naturally self-protective and do what they know is safe. Bennett felt that the cast of *Upstairs Downstairs* managed to escape the trap of stereotype for the most part, though he felt the series as a whole did not – that in fact the treatment of real people and problems in Edwardian times was far from serious, and that the series degenerated into an all-too-common kind of television entertainment.

Bennett personally feels that television as a medium is a particular challenge to actors to give good performances, that they don't really have a chance to 'get the bit between their teeth' as they might do in a stage play. During the studio recording a performance is given over a period of hours, with frequent starts and stops in the taping.

Though the original plan called for two directors who would work closely together, in the end there were five directors for the 13 episodes:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Derek Bennett** | Episodes 1, 2, 3 and 7 |
| **Joan Kemp Welch** | Episodes 4, 5 and 6 |
| **Raymond Menmuir** | Episodes 8, 10 and 12 |
| **Brian Parker** | Episodes 9 and 11 |
| **Herbert Wise** | Episode 13 |

The entire series was to be made in colour but the first VTR was hit by the colour strike and the first six episodes were made in black and white. After all thirteen were taped, the first play was re-done in colour and re-directed by Raymond Menmuir, since Derek Bennett was not available at that time. The diversity of directors was a case of necessity turned to advantage: though he hadn't planned it that way, John Hawkesworth eventually felt that as the series used the same sets and the same actors, the fresh views that new directors brought to the given situation gave the series a vitality it would otherwise have lacked.

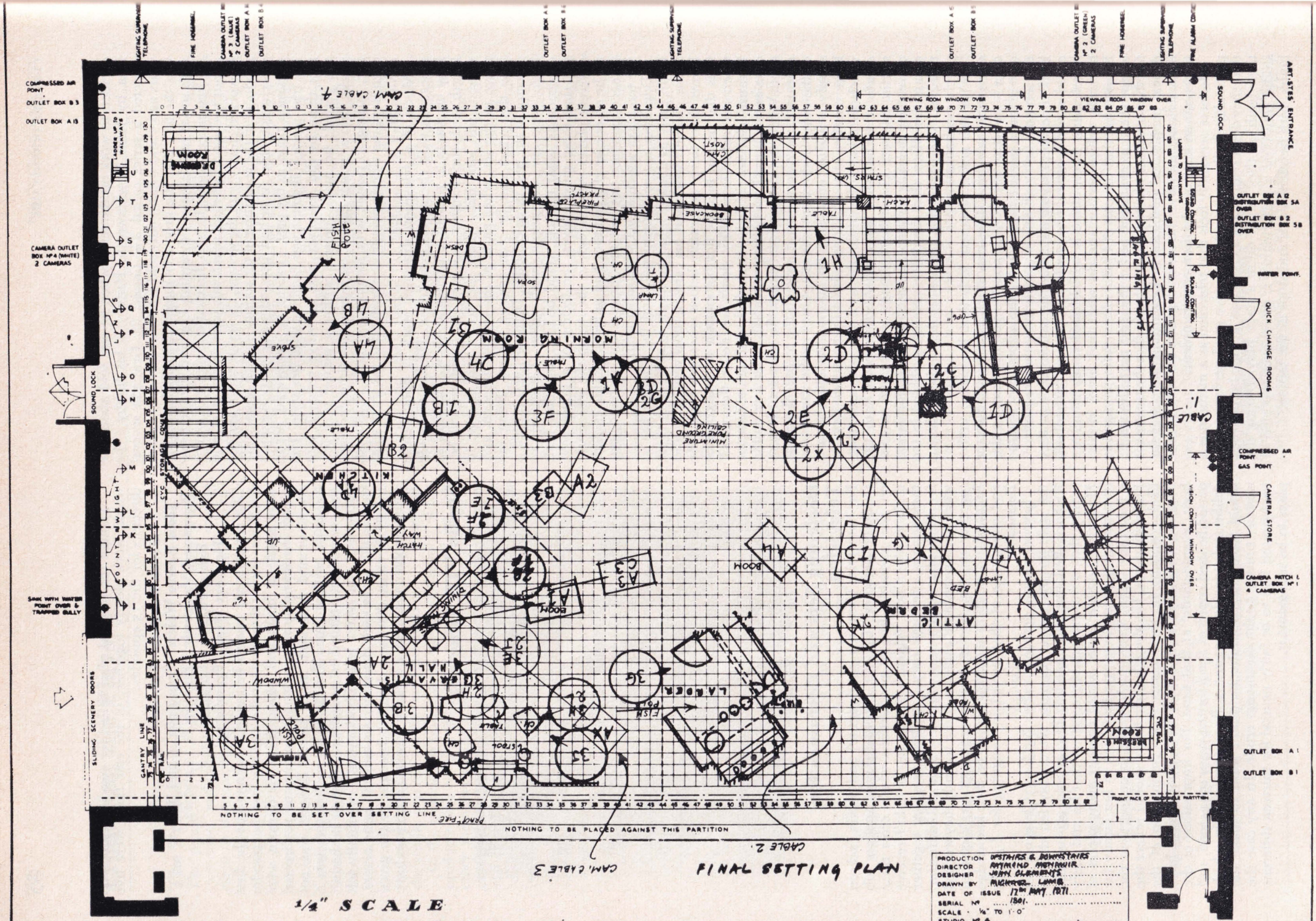
## Studio VTR Timetable

| SCENE NO. | SET/ARTISTS | CAMS. | SHOTS | PAGE | SOUND | INT EXT D/N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 7/8.165 EATON PLACE. | - | - | I-1 | MUTE. | EXT DAY |
| 2. | SERVANTS HALL/STAIRS<br>SARAH<br>ROSE | 1/2/4 | I-5 | I-1/2 | FISHPOLE SLUNG MIKE FX: HORSE PASSING | INT DAY |
| 3. | SERVANTS HALL<br>SARAH<br>ROSE | 3/4 | 6-7 | I-2 | BOOM A. | INT DAY |
| | C U T V.T.R. | | | | | |
| 4. | SERVANTS HALL/ KITCHEN<br>SARAH<br>EMILY<br>MRS. BRIDGES<br>ALFRED | 1/2/3/4 | 8-17 | I-2/4 | BOOKS A/B MIKE IN ARCHWAY | INT DAY |
| | /C U T V. T.R./ | | | | | |
| | HALL<br>HUDSON<br>SARAH | 2/3/4 | 18/20 | I-5 | BOOM C TAPE | INT DAY |
| 6. Pt 1 | MORNING ROOM<br>HUDSON<br>LADY MARJORIE | 1/3 | 21/22 | I-5 | BOOM A | INT DAY |
| 9. | HALL<br>SARAH<br>HUDSON | 3/4 | 23/24 | I-6 | BOOM C | INT DAY |
| | C U T V.T.R. | | | | | |
| 6. Pt 2 | MORNING ROOM.<br>LADY MARJORIE<br>SARAH | 1/2/3/4 | 25-39 | I-7/8 | BOOM B<br>BOOM A | INT DAY |
| | C U T V.T.R. | | | | | |

## Designing Sets and Costumes for Television

For both John Clements (set designer) and Sheila Jackson (costume designer) *Upstairs Downstairs* was another job on the assembly line of productions which cross their desks at Wembley. Which is not to say it didn't receive their serious attention: they have been working together for nearly fifteen years – since the early days of Rediffusion, when plays were broadcast live. More recently they worked together on the *Wicked Women* series set in Victorian England in the 1860's and drew heavily on their knowledge and experience of that period in designing for *Upstairs Downstairs*.

Several design decisions taken by John Clements set the style for the series. He quite reasonably felt that as Richard Bellamy had married into an old aristocratic family, that it was reasonable to expect that his and Lady Marjorie's London house would contain many pieces of furniture and decoration that had been in her family for a long time – that were much earlier in period than the Edwardian era. He also felt their house should reflect the likely contrast in their tastes – a combination of the classical, monumental and rich with what would have been 'avante-garde' at that time. For impressions of the period he used copies of *Punch* for the years 1904–1906, and deliberately decided against a floridness in style which would have been possible: he didn't want to make the upstairs sinister or the downstairs crude. In any case the background had to be fairly neutral for thirteen different plays to be set against it.

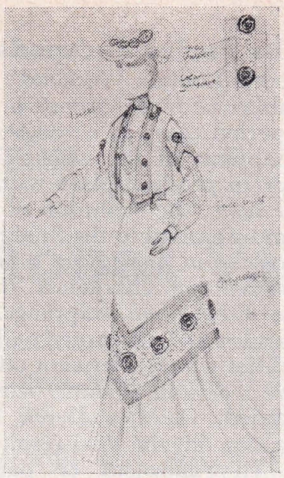


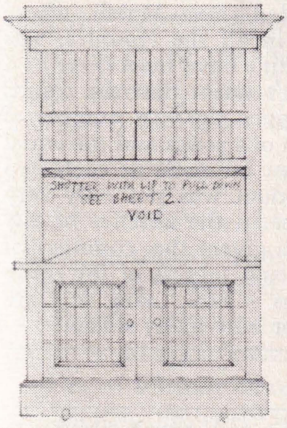

1/4" SCALE

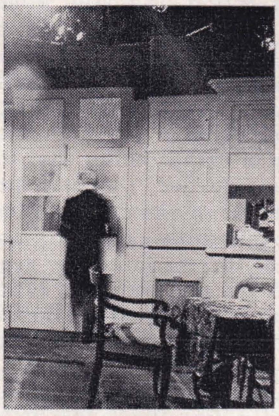
# WEMBLEY-STUDIO Nº 4

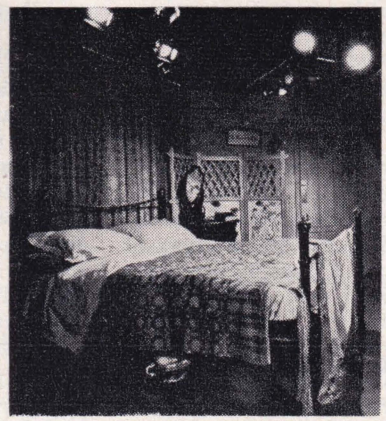
FINAL SETTING PLAN

Left to right: Sheila Jackson's sketches for costumes in Episode 1. Lady Marjorie's dress, front and back, and Sarah's outdoor clothes, coat and dress. Below, left to right: John Clement's set designs, detail drawing of basement cupboard unit allowing camera shots through centre opening, the unit as realized, and the maids' bedroom in the attic.







## Permanent Set

**Below Stairs**
Kitchen and Scullery. Servants' Hall. Passage, stairs up, and back door. Butler's Pantry.

**Above Stairs**
Ground floor: Front door, and staircase. Morning Room. First floor: Drawing room. Boudoir off bedroom. Small bedroom.
Attic: Landing and maids' bedroom.

The number of rooms was determined by the size of the studios which at LWT are smaller than at the BBC. The sets had to be designed so they could be used in all the episodes, also so they could be made physically larger or smaller to allow for different camera angles and numbers of characters when filming in the studio.

John Clements received the same written briefs as the writers, and he read all the scripts. As John Hawkesworth had considerable design experience, the two of them worked closely together. After initial discussions, Clements did a rough plan of the studio lay-out and small diagrammatic sketches of each set. There then followed discussions with the directors. Next a prop list – 400 different objects – and three or four days out looking for the right props, some of which were bought in antique shops, others hired for six months. He made up a plan of the position of the furniture. At this stage came a planning meeting with technical staff (lighting, sound and cameramen). Finally he constructed three-dimensional cardboard models of the sets, and did detailed working drawings. Throughout this process Clements had the help of a personal assistant who does drafting, prepares working drawings, supervises the construction of the sets, and then in the studio does the fetching and carrying. Designers try to work regularly with the same technical crews as there is an enormous amount of activity in the studio during filming which must be accomplished silently: they like to be able to read each other's minds. The designers are also in daily contact with the directors.

For a television designer, design is not a matter of simply drawing impressionistic pictures of what the sets should look and feel like. He must be fully aware of lighting and sound problems and possible camera shots, and take these into account when he designs; he also acts as adviser to the director on possible camera shots. For example, in designing the below stairs, it was soon obvious that there was not going to be sufficient access and mobility for the cameras. So Clements designed a special cupboard unit between the kitchen and the servants' hall with a sliding panel in the middle which could be either kept closed, or opened for an extra camera position. It wasn't practical to have a fixed staircase either below or above stairs, so Clements designed units which could be wheeled on and off, when needed for particular scenes. The placing of sound equipment has to be taken into account in the designs; microphones frequently have to be hidden in lamp fittings, table lamps, gramophones, or the like. In one particular instance, the director wanted a long shot and the microphone couldn't be placed near the actors because of shadows. They couldn't use a boom mike for the same reason, so Clements found a needle-work box for the foreground to conceal the mike.

Clements remembered another scene in the series which required fairly complicated design solutions. In Episode 9 Emily meets her boy friend in a cafe: the director wanted most of all to emphasize the intimacy of the atmosphere. So Clements designed a tiny room with movable walls. The scene opened with a high angle shot into a semi-basement – the cafe – looking from the pavement above, through a window onto the actors seated at a table. The next shot was a long shot with a low angle camera which moved during the course of the scene through 360 degrees around the table. To manage this the walls were removed as the camera moved around, and then replaced. The furniture was attached to the walls, which increased the illusion of a confined space and disguised the trick.

John Clements enjoyed designing for *Upstairs Downstairs* but he felt that with a series the designer is more a craftsman than an artist. He has more opportunity for creative design with a one-off play.

Opposite: LWT studio floor plan showing the jigsaw puzzle the designer has to solve in fitting all the sets onto the stage and leaving room for principal camera (circles) and sound boom (rectangles) positions.

Sarah (Pauline Collins) and Rose (Jean Marsh) getting ready for bed in their attic bedroom. Note the careful attention to detail in the set and the period underwear.

### Costumes

Sheila Jackson worked closely with John Clements, particularly in co-ordinating the colour in the costumes with the colours in the sets. She began work on the costumes about five weeks before rehearsals of the first play began. She began by doing some preliminary research on the period and then went on a fairly typical shopping expedition to the West End to purchase materials. She then contacted the actors and arranged to meet them for measurements and to get an impression of them to help her in the designs. Throughout she tried to work one episode ahead. Women's costumes were specially made for the series; men's costumes were hired.

### How Far the Series Succeeded

In certain respects London Weekend's *Upstairs Downstairs* followed a number of recent trends in television – in the popularity of period plays as witnessed by the increasing number of adaptions of the classics, and in the fairly recent tendency to produce plays within a series format. Tracing, as we have, the evolution of the series from the original idea and proposal to the final plays, shows clearly that this could simply have been a lightweight comedy series, with stereotype characters in stock situations, dressed out in Edwardian trappings. Something more serious was intended and attempted within the increasingly limited possibilities which television offers today.

Retrospective reactions of some people involved in the productions varied. Director Derek Bennett and playwright Fay Weldon felt the final result inclined too much towards pure entertainment or pap. Producer John Hawkesworth felt that they'd managed to achieve much of what they'd originally intended. Jean Marsh, whose idea it all was and who acted in all the episodes, was disappointed that the series couldn't have been done in a 'documentary' style: she wouldn't claim that the results were 'art' though she felt, that given the vast number of people involved in the production of a series and the equal number of compromises that must be made at each step as a consequence, the final product was not only very saleable but of some significance. In the absence of any serious television criticism, and given the commercial nature of the medium, the eventual success of the series depends on the audience ratings – how many sets are tuned in, in how many homes, for how many weeks.

## Stories of the First Six Episodes

**On Trial** Clemence (Sarah) arrives at the front door of the Bellamy house which is answered by Hudson. He instructs her to enter through the servants' entrance in the area. Sarah is taken in by Rose and meets the cold eyes of the servants. She is then shown upstairs by Hudson to Lady Marjorie. Clemence's references are examined, she is employed, and her name is changed by Lady Marjorie to Sarah – 'Clemence is not a servant's name.' Sarah meets the other servants at dinner, all of whom seem to resent her presence: she learns that Alfred is a religious fanatic, that Pearce is a dirty-minded devil, that Roberts is a bitch, and Emily a naïve young Irish lass. Sarah begins to tell stories of an opulent past in a French chateau. Rose ridicules her in an attempt to undermine her self-confidence. Sarah discovers that Mrs. Bridges 'sells' kitchen supplies clandestinely – she tries the same trick, but is caught and punished with the order to write the Sixth Commandment. But she can't read or write. Only in her humiliation is Sarah really accepted into the downstairs world. Rose can now take the new girl under her wing – and help her.

**The Mistress and the Maids** Lady Marjorie is having her portrait painted by a popular artist named Scone. Sarah is asked to take a selection of her mistress's dresses to the artist's flat. Scone is fascinated by the servant Sarah and asks permission to paint her: Sarah, ready for any adventure, agrees. During the sittings they become friends and Sarah waits to be seduced, but Scone maintains a respect for her which her social position wouldn't ordinarily justify. A scandel is caused when the painter exhibits at the Royal Academy two portraits, hanging side-by-side – mistress and maids. Bellamy intends to sack Sarah (and Rose who had also been included in the painting) until Scone intervenes.

**Board Wages** While the Bellamys are in the country, their son comes home from abroad suddenly, to find all of the servants upstairs having a party on the sly, with Sarah dressed in Lady Marjorie's clothes. Caught in the act, the servants try to slip away unnoticed. But James won't allow it and forces them to act out a bizarre charade whereby he plays the part of the butler Hudson and waits on the servants, forcing them to be merry and drink the master's champagne. He then makes a pass at Sarah who, in refusing him, shows him to be a cad. Sarah decides to leave, packs her bag and goes.

**The Path of Duty** The Bellamy's daughter Elizabeth arrives home from a Dresden finishing school full of ideas for social reform and with a disrespect for her class and the social system. She embarrasses her parents at a tea party, and when she is told she is going to meet the Royal Family at a ball she is unimpressed and begs leave to miss the occasion. She does go to the ball – to please her parents – but in a fit of disgust flees from the ballroom into the streets. She doesn't arrive home until the early hours of the morning, enters the house through the servants' entrance, is lectured by Rose, and is finally reconciled with her father.

**A Suitable Marriage** A young German Baron, Klaus, comes to visit the Bellamys and a relationship begins to form between him and Elizabeth, who falls head-over-heels in love. At the same time Alfred, the Footman, is also becoming fond of the Baron. Bellamy suspects the motives of the German's visit and discovers that he has really come to sell a new naval weapon to the British Navy. He wonders if this is perhaps the reason for the 'friendship' with his daughter. A dinner party is arranged, ostensibly to discuss with members of the Admiralty the Baron's proposition – in fact to catch him out as a spy. On the evening, however, Rose discovers Alfred and Klaus kissing one another; she tells Hudson who informs Bellamy, who summons the police. When they arrive, however, Klaus and Alfred have fled and there is only the jilted Elizabeth to be consoled.

**A Cry for Help** The new under housemaid Mary is pregnant. She is discovered by Bellamy leaving late at night to contact an abortionist and she discloses to him her condition and her distress. Moved by humanitarian motives, he persuades her not to murder the baby, to divulge the father's name (the son of a wealthy and influential friend of Bellamy's). Bellamy promises to help the girl, talks with the young man, who refuses to acknowledge responsibility, and writes to the man's father. His concern is rewarded by the threat of a court action unless Mary signs a document saying she lied. Bellamy allows her to do this, knowing that his career and family are threatened if she doesn't. Mary leaves the household to fend as best she can with pregnancy, birth, and being an unmarried mother.